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# THE MYSTICS OF ISLAM

BY

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

IF Judaism, Christianity and Islam have no little in common in spite of their deep dogmatic differences, the spiritual content of that common element can best be appreciated in Jewish, Christian and Islamic mysticism, which bears equal testimony to that ever-deepening experience of the soul when the spiritual worshipper, whether he be follower of Moses or Jesus or Mohammed, turns whole-heartedly to God. As the Quest Series has already supplied for the first time those interested in such matters with a simple general introduction to Jewish mysticism, so it now provides an easy approach to the study of Islamic mysticism on which in English there exists no separate introduction. But not only have we in the following pages all that the general reader requires to be told at first about Sūfism; we have also a large amount of material that will be new even to professional

v



Orientalists. Dr. Nicholson sets before us the results of twenty years' unremitting labour, and that, too, with remarkable simplicity and clarity for such a subject; at the same time he lets the mystics mostly speak for themselves and mainly in his own fine versions from the original Arabic and Persian.

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# THE MYSTICS OF ISLAM

## INTRODUCTION

THE title of this book sufficiently explains why it is included in a Series 'exemplifying the adventures and labours of individual seekers or groups of seekers in quest of reality.' Sūfism, the religious philosophy of Islam, is described in the oldest extant definition as 'the apprehension of divine realities,' and Mohammedan mystics are fond of calling themselves *Ahl al-Haqq*, 'the followers of the Real.'<sup>1</sup> In attempting to set forth their central doctrines from this point of view, I shall draw to some extent on materials which I have collected during the last twenty years for a general history of Islamic mysticism—a subject so vast and many-sided that several large volumes would be required to do it anything like justice. Here I can only sketch

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Haqq* is the term generally used by Sūfis when they refer to God.

in broad outline certain principles, methods, and characteristic features of the inner life as it has been lived by Moslems of every class and condition from the eighth century of our era to the present day. Difficult are the paths which they threaded, dark and bewildering the pathless heights beyond; but even if we may not hope to accompany the travellers to their journey's end, any information that we have gathered concerning their religious environment and spiritual history will help us to understand the strange experiences of which they write.

In the first place, therefore, I propose to offer a few remarks on the origin and historical development of Sūfism, its relation to Islam, and its general character. Not only are these matters interesting to the student of comparative religion; some knowledge of them is indispensable to any serious student of Sūfism itself. It may be said, truly enough, that all mystical experiences ultimately meet in a single point; but that point assumes widely different aspects according to the mystic's religion, race, and temperament, while the converging lines of approach admit of almost infinite variety. Though all the great types of mysticism have something in common, each is marked by peculiar characteristics resulting from the circum-

## INTRODUCTION

stances in which it arose and flourished. Just as the Christian type cannot be understood without reference to Christianity; so the Mohammedan type must be viewed in connexion with the outward and inward development of Islam.

The word 'mystic,' which has passed from Greek religion into European literature, is represented in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, the three chief languages of Islam, by 'Sūfī.' The terms, however, are not precisely synonymous, for 'Sūfī' has a specific religious connotation, and is restricted by usage to those mystics who profess the Mohammedan faith. And the Arabic word, although in course of time it appropriated the high significance of the Greek—lips sealed by holy mysteries, eyes closed in visionary rapture—bore a humbler meaning when it first gained currency (about 800 A.D.). Until recently its derivation was in dispute. Most Sūfīs, flying in the face of etymology, have derived it from an Arabic root which conveys the notion of 'purity'; this would make 'Sūfī' mean 'one who is pure in heart' or 'one of the elect.' Some European scholars identified it with σοφός in the sense of 'theosophist.' But Nöldeke, in an article written twenty years ago, showed conclusively that the name was derived from sūf (wool), and was originally applied to those Moslem

ascetics who, in imitation of Christian hermits, clad themselves in coarse woollen garb as a sign of penitence and renunciation of worldly vanities.

The earliest Sūfīs were, in fact, ascetics and quietists rather than mystics. An overwhelming consciousness of sin, combined with a dread—which it is hard for us to realise—of Judgment Day and the torments of Hell-fire, so vividly painted in the Koran, drove them to seek salvation in flight from the world. On the other hand, the Koran warned them that salvation depended entirely on the inscrutable will of Allah, who guides aright the good and leads astray the wicked. Their fate was inscribed on the eternal tables of His providence, nothing could alter it. Only this was sure, that if they were destined to be saved by fasting and praying and pious works—then they would be saved. Such a belief ends naturally in quietism, complete and unquestioning submission to the divine will, an attitude characteristic of Sūfism in its oldest form. The mainspring of Moslem religious life during the eighth century was fear—fear of God, fear of Hell, fear of death, fear of sin—but the opposite motive had already begun to make its influence felt, and produced in the saintly woman Rābī'a at least one conspicuous example of truly mystical self-abandonment.

So far, there was no great difference between the Sūfī and the orthodox Moham-medan zealot, except that the Sūfīs attached extraordinary importance to certain Koranic doctrines, and developed them at the expense of others which many Moslems might consider equally essential. It must also be allowed that the ascetic movement was inspired by Christian ideals, and contrasted sharply with the active and pleasure-loving spirit of Islam. In a famous sentence the Prophet denounced monkish austerities and bade his people devote themselves to the holy war against unbelievers; and he gave, as is well known, the most convincing testimony in favour of marriage. Although his condemnation of celibacy did not remain without effect, the conquest of Persia, Syria, and Egypt by his successors brought the Moslems into contact with ideas which profoundly modified their outlook on life and religion. European readers of the Koran cannot fail to be struck by its author's vacillation and inconsistency in dealing with the greatest problems. He himself was not aware of these contradictions, nor were they a stumbling-block to his devout followers, whose simple faith accepted the Koran as the Word of God. But the rift was there, and soon produced far-reaching results.

Hence arose the Murjites, who set faith



above works and emphasised the divine love and goodness; the Qadarites who affirmed, and the Jabarites who denied, that men are responsible for their actions; the Mu'tazilites, who built a theology on the basis of reason, rejecting the qualities of Allah as incompatible with His unity, and predestinarianism as contrary to His justice; and finally the Ash'arites, the scholastic theologians of Islam, who formulated the rigid metaphysical and doctrinal system that underlies the creed of orthodox Mohammedans at the present time. All these speculations, influenced as they were by Greek theology and philosophy, reacted powerfully upon Sūfism. Early in the third century of the Hegira—the ninth after Christ—we find manifest signs of the new leaven stirring within it. Not that Sūfīs ceased to mortify the flesh and take pride in their poverty, but they now began to regard asceticism as only the first stage of a long journey, the preliminary training for a larger spiritual life than the mere ascetic is able to conceive. The nature of the change may be illustrated by quoting a few sentences which have come down to us from the mystics of this period.

“Love is not to be learned from men: it is one of God's gifts and comes of His grace.”

“None refrains from the lusts of this world save him in whose heart there is a

light that keeps him always busied with the next world."

"When the gnostic's spiritual eye is opened, his bodily eye is shut : he sees nothing but God."

"If gnosis were to take visible shape all who looked thereon would die at the sight of its beauty and loveliness and goodness and grace, and every brightness would become dark beside the splendour thereof."<sup>1</sup>

"Gnosis is nearer to silence than to speech."

"When the heart weeps because it has lost, the spirit laughs because it has found."

"Nothing sees God and dies, even as nothing sees God and lives, because His life is everlasting : whoever sees it is thereby made everlasting."

"O God, I never listen to the cry of animals or to the quivering of trees or to the murmuring of water or to the warbling of birds or to the rustling wind or to the crashing thunder without feeling them to be an evidence of Thy unity and a proof that there is nothing like unto Thee."

<sup>1</sup> Compare Plato, *Phædrus* (Jowett's translation): "For sight is the keenest of our bodily senses; though not by that is wisdom seen; her loveliness would have been transporting if there had been a visible image of her."

“O my God, I invoke Thee in public as lords are invoked, but in private as loved ones are invoked. Publicly I say, ‘O my God!’ but privately I say, ‘O my Beloved!’”

These ideas—Light, Knowledge, and Love—form, as it were, the keynote of the new Sūfism, and in the following chapters I shall endeavour to show how they were developed. Ultimately they rest upon a pantheistic faith which deposed the One transcendent God of Islam and worshipped in His stead One Real Being who dwells and works everywhere, and whose throne is not less, but more, in the human heart than in the heaven of heavens. Before going further, it will be convenient to answer a question which the reader may have asked himself—Whence did the Moslems of the ninth century derive this doctrine?

Modern research has proved that the origin of Sūfism cannot be traced back to a single definite cause, and has thereby discredited the sweeping generalisations which represent it, for instance, as a reaction of the Aryan mind against a conquering Semitic religion, and as the product, essentially, of Indian or Persian thought. Statements of this kind, even when they are partially true, ignore the principle that in order to establish an historical connexion between A and B, it is not enough to bring

## INTRODUCTION

forward evidence of their likeness to one another, without showing at the same time (1) that the actual relation of B to A was such as to render the assumed filiation possible, and (2) that the possible hypothesis fits in with all the ascertained and relevant facts. Now, the theories which I have mentioned do not satisfy these conditions. If Sūfism was nothing but a revolt of the Aryan spirit, how are we to explain the undoubted fact that some of the leading pioneers of Mohammedan mysticism were natives of Syria and Egypt, and Arabs by race? Similarly, the advocates of a Buddhist or Vedāntic origin forget that the main current of Indian influence upon Islamic civilisation belongs to a later epoch, whereas Moslem theology, philosophy, and science put forth their first luxuriant shoots on a soil that was saturated with Hellenistic culture. The truth is that Sūfism is a complex thing, and therefore no simple answer can be given to the question how it originated. We shall have gone far, however, towards answering that question when we have distinguished the various movements and forces which moulded Sūfism, and determined what direction it should take in the early stages of its growth.

Let us first consider the most important external, i.e. non-Islamic, influences.

## I. CHRISTIANITY

It is obvious that the ascetic and quietistic tendencies to which I have referred were in harmony with Christian theory and drew nourishment therefrom. Many Gospel texts and apocryphal sayings of Jesus are cited in the oldest Sūfī biographies, and the Christian anchorite (*rāhib*) often appears in the rôle of a teacher giving instruction and advice to wandering Moslem ascetics. We have seen that the woollen dress, from which the name 'Sūfī' is derived, is of Christian origin: vows of silence, litanies (*dhikr*), and other ascetic practices may be traced to the same source. As regards the doctrine of divine love, the following extracts speak for themselves:

"Jesus passed by three men. Their bodies were lean and their faces pale. He asked them, saying, 'What hath brought you to this plight?' They answered, 'Fear of the Fire.' Jesus said, 'Ye fear a thing created, and it behoves God that He should save those who fear.' Then he left them and passed by three others, whose faces were paler and their bodies leaner, and asked them, saying, 'What hath brought you to this plight?' They answered, 'Longing for Paradise.' He said, 'Ye

desire a thing created, and it behoves God that He should give you that which ye hope for.' Then he went on and passed by three others of exceeding paleness and leanness, so that their faces were as mirrors of light, and he said, 'What hath brought you to this?' They answered, 'Our love of God.' Jesus said, 'Ye are the nearest to Him, ye are the nearest to Him.' "

The Syrian mystic, Ahmad ibn al-Hawārī, once asked a Christian hermit :

" 'What is the strongest command that ye find in your Scriptures?' The hermit replied : ' We find none stronger than this : " Love thy Creator with all thy power and might. " ' "

Another hermit was asked by some Moslem ascetics :

" 'When is a man most persevering in devotion?' 'When love takes possession of his heart,' was the reply ; 'for then he hath no joy or pleasure but in continual devotion.' "

The influence of Christianity through its hermits, monks, and heretical sects (e.g. the Messalians or Euchitæ) was twofold : ascetic and mystical. Oriental Christian mysticism, however, contained a Pagan element : it had long ago absorbed the ideas and adopted the language of Plotinus and the Neoplatonic school.

## II. NEOPLATONISM

Aristotle, not Plato, is the dominant figure in Moslem philosophy, and few Mohammedans are familiar with the name of Plotinus, who was more commonly called 'the Greek Master' (*al-Sheykh al-Yaḥḡānī*). But since the Arabs gained their first knowledge of Aristotle from his Neoplatonic commentators, the system with which they became imbued was that of Porphyry and Proclus. Thus the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, of which an Arabic version appeared in the ninth century, is actually a manual of Neoplatonism.

Another work of this school deserves particular notice: I mean the writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, the convert of St. Paul. The pseudo-Dionysius—he may have been a Syrian monk—narrates as his teacher a certain Hierotheus, whom Frothingham has identified with Stephen Bar Sudaili, a prominent Syrian gnostic and a contemporary of Jacob of Sarūj (451–502 A.D.). Dionysius quotes some fragments of erotic hymns by this Stephen, and a complete work, the *Book of Hierotheus on the Hidden Mysteries of the Divinity*, has come down to us in a unique manuscript which is now in the British Museum. The Dionysian writings were turned into Latin by John Scotus Erigena.

founded medieval Christian mysticism in Western Europe. Their influence in the East was hardly less vital. They were translated from Greek into Syriac almost immediately on their appearance, and their doctrine was vigorously propagated by commentaries in the same tongue. "About 850 A.D. Dionysius was known from the Tigris to the Atlantic."

Besides literary tradition, there were other channels by which the doctrines of emanation, illumination, gnosis, and ecstasy were transmitted, but enough has been said to convince the reader that Greek mystical ideas were in the air and easily accessible to the Moslem inhabitants of Western Asia and Egypt, where the Sūfī theosophy first took shape. One of those who bore the chief part in its development, Dhu 'l-Nūn the Egyptian, is described as a philosopher and alchemist—in other words, a student of Hellenistic science. When it is added that much of his speculation agrees with what we find, for example, in the writings of Dionysius, we are drawn irresistibly to the conclusion (which, as I have pointed out, is highly probable on general grounds) that Neoplatonism poured into Islam a large tincture of the same mystical element in which Christianity was already steeped.



III. GNOSTICISM.<sup>1</sup>

Though little direct evidence is available, the conspicuous place occupied by the theory of gnosis in early Šūfī speculation suggests contact with Christian Gnosticism, and it is worth noting that the parents of Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, whose definition of Sūfism as 'the apprehension of divine realities' was quoted on the first page of this Introduction, are said to have been Sābians, *i.e.*, Manḍæans, dwelling in the Babylonian fenland between Basra and Wāsīt. Other Moslem saints had learned 'the mystery of the Great Name.' It was communicated to Ibrāhīm ibn Adham by a man whom he met while travelling in the desert, and as soon as he pronounced it he saw the prophet Khadir (Elias). The ancient Sūfis borrowed from the Manichæans the term *siddīq*, which they apply to their own spiritual adepts, and a later school, returning to the dualism of Mānī, held the view that the diversity of phenomena arises from the admixture of light and darkness.

"The ideal of human action is freedom from the taint of darkness; and the freedom of light from darkness

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Goldziher, "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im Hadīṭ," in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, xxii. 317 ff.

means the self-consciousness of light as light.”<sup>1</sup>

The following version of the doctrine of the seventy thousand veils as explained by a modern Rifā’ī dervish shows clear traces of Gnosticism and is so interesting that I cannot refrain from quoting it here :

“Seventy Thousand Veils separate Allah, the One Reality, from the world of matter and of sense. And every soul passes before his birth through these seventy thousand. The inner half of these are veils of light : the outer half, veils of darkness. For every one of the veils of light passed through, in this journey towards birth, the soul puts *off* a divine quality : and for every one of the dark veils, it puts *on* an earthly quality. Thus the child is born *weeping*, for the soul knows its separation from Allah, the One Reality. And when the child cries in its sleep, it is because the soul remembers something of what it has lost. Otherwise, the passage through the veils has brought with it forgetfulness (*nisyān*) : and for this reason man is called *insān*. He is now, as it were, in prison in his body, separated by these thick curtains from Allah.

<sup>1</sup> Shaikh Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (1908), p. 150.

"But the whole purpose of Sūfism, the Way of the dervish, is to give him an escape from this prison, an apocalypse of the Seventy Thousand Veils, a recovery of the original unity with The One, *while still in this body*. The body is not to be put off; it is to be refined and made spiritual—a help and not a hindrance to the spirit. It is like a metal that has to be refined by fire and transmuted. And the sheikh tells the aspirant that he has the secret of this transmutation. 'We shall throw you into the fire of Spiritual Passion,' he says, 'and you will emerge refined.'"<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. BUDDHISM

Before the Mohammedan conquest of India in the eleventh century, the teaching of Buddha exerted considerable influence in Eastern Persia and Transoxania. We hear of flourishing Buddhist monasteries in Balkh, the metropolis of ancient Bactria; a city famous for the number of Sūfis who resided in it. Professor Goldziher has called attention to the significant circumstance that the Sūfī ascetic, Ibrāhīm ibn Adhām, appears in Moslem legend as a prince of Balkh who abandoned his throne and

<sup>1</sup> "The Way" of a Mohammedan Mystic, by W. H. T. Gairdner (Leipzig, 1912), pp. 9 f.

became a wandering dervish—the story of Buddha over again. The Sūfīs learned the use of rosaries from Buddhist monks, and, without entering into details, it may be safely asserted that the method of Sūfism, so far as it is one of ethical self-culture, ascetic meditation, and intellectual abstraction, owes a good deal to Buddhism. But the features which the two systems have in common only accentuate the fundamental difference between them. In spirit they are poles apart. The Buddhist moralises himself, the Sūfī becomes moral only through knowing and loving God.

The Sūfī conception of the passing-away (*fanā*) of individual self in Universal Being is certainly, I think, of Indian origin. Its first great exponent was the Persian mystic, Bāyazīd of Bistām, who may have received it from his teacher, Abū ‘Alī of Sind (Scinde). Here are some of his sayings:

“Creatures are subject to changing ‘states,’ but the gnostic has no ‘state,’ because his vestiges are effaced and his essence annihilated by the essence of another, and his traces are lost in another’s traces.”

“Thirty years the high God was my mirror, now I am my own mirror,” *i.e.* according to the explanation given by his biographer, “that which I was I am no more, for ‘I’ and ‘God’ is a denial

of the unity of God. Since I am no more, the high God is His own mirror."

"I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, 'O Thou I!'"

This, it will be observed, is not Buddhism, but the pantheism of the Vedānta. We cannot identify *fanā* with Nirvāṇa unconditionally. Both terms imply the passing-away of individuality, but while Nirvāṇa is purely negative, *fanā* is accompanied by *baqā*, everlasting life in God. The rapture of the Sūfī who has lost himself in ecstatic contemplation of the divine beauty is entirely opposed to the passionless intellectual serenity of the Arāhat. I emphasise this contrast because, in my opinion, the influence of Buddhism on Mohammedan thought has been exaggerated. Much is attributed to Buddhism that is Indian rather than specifically Buddhistic: the *fanā* theory of the Sūfīs is a case in point. Ordinary Moslems held the followers of Buddha in abhorrence, regarding them as idolaters, and were not likely to seek personal intercourse with them. On the other hand, for nearly a thousand years before the Mohammedan conquest, Buddhism had been powerful in Bactria and Eastern Persia generally: it must, therefore, have affected the development of Sūfism in these regions.

While *fanā* in its pantheistic form is

radically different from Nirvāṇa, the terms coincide so closely in other ways that we cannot regard them as being altogether unconnected. *Fanā* has an ethical aspect: it involves the extinction of all passions and desires. The passing-away of evil qualities and of the evil actions which they produce is said to be brought about by the continuance of the corresponding good qualities and actions. Compare this with the definition of Nirvāṇa given by Professor Rhys Davids:

“The extinction of that sinful, grasping condition of mind and heart, which would otherwise, according to the great mystery of Karma, be the cause of renewed individual existence. That extinction is to be brought about by, and runs parallel with, the growth of the opposite condition of mind and heart; and it is complete when that opposite condition is reached.”

Apart from the doctrine of Karma, which is alien to Sūfism, these definitions of *fanā* (viewed as a moral state) and Nirvāṇa agree almost word for word. It would be out of place to pursue the comparison further, but I think we may conclude that the Sūfī theory of *fanā* was influenced to some extent by Buddhism as well as by Perso-Indian pantheism.

The receptivity of Islam to foreign ideas has been recognised by every unbiassed

inquirer, and the history of Sūfism is only a single instance of the general rule. But this fact should not lead us to seek in such ideas an explanation of the whole question which I am now discussing, or to identify Sūfism itself with the extraneous ingredients which it absorbed and assimilated in the course of its development. Even if Islam had been miraculously shut off from contact with foreign religions and philosophies, some form of mysticism would have arisen within it, for the seeds were already there. Of course, we cannot isolate the internal forces working in this direction, since they were subject to the law of spiritual gravitation. The powerful currents of thought discharged through the Mohammedan world by the great non-Islamic systems above mentioned gave a stimulus to various tendencies within Islam which affected Sūfism either positively or negatively. As we have seen, its oldest type is an ascetic revolt against luxury and worldliness; later on, the prevailing rationalism and scepticism provoked counter-movements towards intuitive knowledge and emotional faith, and also an orthodox reaction which in its turn drove many earnest Moslems into the ranks of the mystics.

How, it may be asked, could a religion founded on the simple and austere monotheism of Mohammed tolerate these new

doctrines, much less make terms with them ? It would seem impossible to reconcile the transcendent personality of Allah with an immanent Reality which is the very life and soul of the universe. Yet Islam has accepted Sūfism. The Sūfīs, instead of being excommunicated, are securely established in the Mohammedan church, and the *Legend of the Moslem Saints* records the wildest excesses of Oriental pantheism.

Let us return for a moment to the Koran, that infallible touchstone by which every Mohammedan theory and practice must be proved. Are any germs of mysticism to be found there ? The Koran, as I have said, starts with the notion of Allah, the One, Eternal, and Almighty God, far above human feelings and aspirations—the Lord of His slaves, not the Father of His children ; a judge meting out stern justice to sinners, and extending His mercy only to those who avert His wrath by repentance, humility, and unceasing works of devotion ; a God of fear rather than of love. This is one side, and certainly the most prominent side, of Mohammed's teaching ; but while he set an impassable gulf between the world and Allah, his deeper instinct craved a direct revelation from God to the soul. There are no contradictions in the logic of feeling. Mohammed, who had in him something of the mystic, felt God both as far and



near, both as transcendent and immanent. In the latter aspect, Allah is, the light of the heavens and the earth, a Being who works in the world and in the soul of man.

“If My servants ask thee about Me, lo, I am near.” (Kor. 2. 182); “We (God) are nearer to him than his own neck-vein” (50. 15); “And in the earth are signs to those of real faith, and in yourselves. What! do ye not see?” (51. 20-21).

It was a long time ere they saw. The Moslem consciousness, haunted by terrible visions of the wrath to come, slowly and painfully awoke to the significance of those liberating ideas.

The verses which I have quoted do not stand alone, and however unfavourable to mysticism the Koran as a whole may be, I cannot assent to the view that it supplies no basis for a mystical interpretation of Islam. This was worked out in detail by the Sūfis, who dealt with the Koran in very much the same way as Philo treated the Pentateuch. But they would not have succeeded so thoroughly in bringing over the mass of religious Moslems to their side, unless the champions of orthodoxy had set about constructing a system of scholastic philosophy that reduced the divine nature to a purely formal, changeless, and absolute unity, a bare will devoid of all affections

and emotions, a tremendous and incalculable power with which no human creature could have any communion or personal intercourse whatsoever. That is the God of Mohammedan theology. That was the alternative to Sūfism. Therefore, "all thinking, religious Moslems are mystics," as Professor D. B. Macdonald, one of our best authorities on the subject, has remarked. And he adds: "All, too, are pantheists, but some do not know it."

The relation of individual Sūfīs to Islam varies from more or less entire conformity to a merely nominal profession of belief in Allah and His Prophet. While the Koran and the Traditions are generally acknowledged to be the unalterable standard of religious truth, this acknowledgment does not include the recognition of any external authority which shall decide what is orthodox and what is heretical. Creeds and catechisms count for nothing in the Sūfī's estimation. Why should he concern himself with these when he possesses a doctrine derived immediately from God? As he reads the Koran with studious meditation and rapt attention, lo, the hidden meanings—*infinite, inexhaustible*—of the Holy Word flash upon his inward eye. This is what the Sūfīs call *istinbāt*, a sort of intuitive deduction; the mysterious inflow of divinely revealed knowledge into hearts made pure

by repentance and filled with the thought of God, and the outflow of that knowledge upon the interpreting tongue. Naturally, the doctrines elicited by means of *istinbāt* do not agree very well either with Moham-medan theology or with each other, but the discord is easily explained. Theologians, who interpret the letter, cannot be expected to reach the same conclusions as mystics, who interpret the spirit; and if both classes differ amongst themselves, that is a merciful dispensation of divine wisdom, since theological controversy serves to extinguish religious error, while the variety of mystical truth corresponds to the manifold degrees and modes of mystical experience.

In the chapter on the gnosis I shall enter more fully into the attitude of the Sūfis towards positive religion. It is only a rough-and-ready account of the matter to say that many of them have been good Moslems, many scarcely Moslems at all, and a third party, perhaps the largest, Moslems after a fashion. During the early Middle Ages Islam was a growing organism, and gradually became transformed under the influence of diverse movements, of which Sūfism itself was one. Moham-medan orthodoxy in its present shape owes much to Ghazālī, and Ghazālī was a Sūfī. Through his work and example the Sūfistic inter-

pretation of Islam has in no small measure been harmonised with the rival claims of reason and tradition, but just because of this, he is less valuable than mystics of a purer type to the student who wishes to know what Sūfism essentially is.

Although the numerous definitions of Sūfism which occur in Arabic and Persian books on the subject are historically interesting, their chief importance lies in showing that Sūfism is undefinable. Jalāluddīn Rūmī in his *Masnavī* tells a story about an elephant which some Hindoos were exhibiting in a dark room. Many people gathered to see it, but, as the place was too dark to permit them to see the elephant, they all felt it with their hands, to gain an idea of what it was like. One felt its trunk, and said that the animal resembled a water-pipe; another felt its ear, and said it must be a large fan; another its leg, and thought it must be a pillar; another felt its back, and declared that the beast must be like an immense throne. So it is with those who define Sūfism: they can only attempt to express what they themselves have felt, and there is no conceivable formula that will comprise every shade of personal and intimate religious feeling. Since, however, these definitions illustrate with convenient brevity certain aspects and characteristics of Sūfism, a few specimens may be given.

“ Sūfism is this : that actions should be passing over the Sūfī (*i.e.* being done upon him) which are known to God only, and that he should always be with God in a way that is known to God only.”

“ Sūfism is wholly self-discipline.”

“ Sūfism is, to possess nothing and to be possessed by nothing.”

“ Sūfism is not a system composed of rules or sciences but a moral disposition ; *i.e.* if it were a rule, it could be made one's own by strenuous exertion, and if it were a science, it could be acquired by instruction ; but on the contrary it is a disposition, according to the saying, ‘ Form yourselves on the moral nature of God ’ ; and the moral nature of God cannot be attained either by means of rules or by means of sciences.”

“ Sūfism is freedom and generosity and absence of self-constraint.”

“ It is this : that God should make thee die to thyself and should make thee live in Him.”

“ To behold the imperfection of the phenomenal world, nay, to close the eye to everything imperfect in contemplation of Him who is remote from all imperfection—that is Sūfism.”

“ Sūfism is control of the faculties and observance of the breaths,”

“It is Sūfism to put away what thou hast in thy head, to give what thou hast in thy hand, and not to recoil from whatsoever befalls thee.”

The reader will perceive that Sūfism is a word uniting many divergent meanings, and that in sketching its main features one is obliged to make a sort of composite portrait, which does not represent any particular type exclusively. The Sūfīs are not a sect, they have no dogmatic system, the *ṭarīqas* or paths by which they seek God “are in number as the souls of men” and vary infinitely, though a family likeness may be traced in them all. Descriptions of such a Protean phenomenon must differ widely from one another, and the impression produced in each case will depend on the choice of materials and the prominence given to this or that aspect of the many-sided whole. Now, the essence of Sūfism is best displayed in its extreme type, which is pantheistic and speculative rather than ascetic or devotional. This type, therefore, I have purposely placed in the foreground. The advantage of limiting the field is obvious enough, but entails some loss of proportion. In order to form a fair judgment of Mohammedan mysticism, the following chapters should be supplemented by a companion picture drawn especially from those moderate types which, for want of space, I have unduly neglected.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PATH

MYSTICS of every race and creed have described the progress of the spiritual life as a journey or a pilgrimage. Other symbols have been used for the same purpose, but this one appears to be almost universal in its range. The Sūfī who sets out to seek God calls himself a 'traveller' (*sālik*); he advances by slow 'stages' (*maqāmāt*) along a 'path' (*tarīqat*) to the goal of union with Reality (*fanā fi 'l-Haqq*). Should he venture to make a map of this interior ascent, it will not correspond exactly with any of those made by previous explorers. Such maps or scales of perfection were elaborated by Sūfī teachers at an early period, and the unlucky Moslem habit of systematising has produced an enormous aftercrop. The 'path' expounded by the author of the *Kitāb al-Lumá'*, perhaps the oldest comprehensive treatise on Sūfism that we now possess, consists of the following seven 'stages,' each of which (except the first member of the series) is the result of the 'stages' immediately

preceding it—(1) Repentance, (2) abstinence, (3) renunciation, (4) poverty, (5) patience, (6) trust in God, (7) satisfaction. The ‘stages’ constitute the *ascetic and ethical* discipline of the Sūfī, and must be carefully distinguished from the so-called ‘states’ (*ahcāl*, plural of *hāl*), which form a similar *psychological* chain. The writer whom I have just quoted enumerates ten ‘states’—Meditation, nearness to God, love, fear, hope, longing, intimacy, tranquillity, contemplation, and certainty. While the ‘stages’ can be acquired and mastered by one’s own efforts, the ‘states’ are spiritual feelings and dispositions over which a man has no control:

“They descend from God into his heart, without his being able to repel them when they come or to retain them when they go.”

The Sūfī’s ‘path’ is not finished until he has traversed all the ‘stages,’ making himself perfect in every one of them before advancing to the next, and has also experienced whatever ‘states’ it pleases God to bestow upon him. Then, and only then, is he permanently raised to the higher planes of consciousness which Sūfīs call ‘the Gnosis’ (*ma’rifat*) and ‘the Truth’ (*haqīqat*), where the ‘seeker’ (*tālib*) becomes the ‘knower’ or ‘gnostic’ (*‘ārif*), and realises that knowledge, knower, and known are One.



Having sketched, as briefly as possible, the external framework of the method by which the Sūfī approaches his goal, I shall now try to give some account of its inner workings. The present chapter deals with the first portion of the threefold journey—the Path, the Gnosis, and the Truth—by which the quest of Reality is often symbolised.

The first place in every list of 'stages' is occupied by repentance (*tāwbat*). This is the Moslem term for 'conversion,' and marks the beginning of a new life. In the biographies of eminent Sūfīs the dreams, visions, auditions, and other experiences which caused them to enter on the Path are usually related. Trivial as they may seem, these records have a psychological basis, and, if authentic, would be worth studying in detail. Repentance is described as the

Repentance. awakening of the soul from the slumber of heedlessness, so that the sinner becomes aware of his evil ways and feels contrition for past disobedience. He is not truly penitent, however, unless (1) he at once abandons the sin or sins of which he is conscious, and (2) firmly resolves that he will never return to these sins in the future. If he should fail to keep his vow, he must again turn to God, whose mercy is infinite. A certain well-known Sūfī repented seventy times and fell back into sin seventy times before he made a

lasting repentance. The convert must also, as far as lies in his power, satisfy all those whom he has injured. Many examples of such restitution might be culled from the *legend of the Moslem Saints*.

According to the high, mystical theory, repentance is purely an act of divine grace, coming from God to man, not from man to God. Some one said to Rābī'a :

"I have committed many sins ; if I turn in penitence towards God, will He, turn in mercy towards me ? "

"Nay," she replied, "but if He shall turn towards thee, thou wilt turn towards Him."

The question whether sins ought to be remembered after repentance or forgotten illustrates a fundamental point in Sūfī ethics : I mean the difference between what is taught to novices and disciples and what is held as an esoteric doctrine by adepts. Any Mohammedan director of souls would tell his pupils that to think humbly and remorsefully of one's sins is a sovereign remedy against spiritual pride, but he himself might very well believe that real repentance consists in forgetting everything except God.

"The penitent," says Hujwīrī, "is a lover of God, and the lover of God is in contemplation of God : in contemplation it is wrong to remember

sin, for recollection of sin is a veil between God and the contemplative."

Sin appertains to self-existence, which itself is the greatest of all sins. To forget sin is to forget self.

This is only one application of a principle which, as I have said, runs through the whole ethical system of Sūfism and will be more fully explained in a subsequent chapter. Its dangers are evident, but we must in fairness allow that the same theory of conduct may not be equally suitable to those who have made themselves perfect in moral discipline and to those who are still striving after perfection.

Over the gate of repentance it is written :

"All *self* abandon ye who enter here!"

The convert now begins what is called by Christian mystics the Purgative Way. If he follows the general rule, he will take a director (Sheykh, Pīr, Murshid), *i.e.* a holy

The Sheykh. man of ripe experience and profound knowledge, whose least word is absolute law to his disciples. A 'seeker' who attempts to traverse the 'Path' without assistance receives little sympathy. Of such a one it is said that his guide is Satan, and he is likened to a tree that for want of the gardener's care brings forth 'none or bitter fruit.' Speaking of the Sūfī Sheykhs, Hujwīrī says :

“When a novice joins them, with the purpose of renouncing the world, they subject him to spiritual discipline for the space of three years. If he fulfil the requirements of this discipline, well and good ; otherwise, they declare that he cannot be admitted to the ‘Path.’ The first year is devoted to service of the people, the second year to service of God, and the third year to watching over his own heart. He can serve the people, only when he places himself in the rank of servants and all others in the rank of masters. *i.e.* he must regard all, without exception, as being better than himself, and must deem it his duty to serve all alike. And he can serve God, only when he cuts off all his selfish interests relating either to the present or to the future life, and worships God for God’s sake alone, inasmuch as whoever worships God for any thing’s sake worships himself, not God. And he can watch over his heart, only when his thoughts are collected and every care is dismissed, so that in communion with God he guards his heart from the assaults of heedlessness. When these qualifications are possessed by the novice, he may wear the *muraqqa’at* (the patched frock worn by dervishes) as a true

mystic, not merely as an imitator of others."

Shiblī was a pupil of the famous theologian Junayd of Baghdād. On his conversion, he came to Junayd, saying :

"They tell me that you possess the pearl of divine knowledge : either give it me or sell it." Junayd answered

"I cannot sell it, for you have not the price thereof ; and if I give it you, you will have gained it cheaply. You do not know its value. Cast yourself headlong, like me, into this ocean, in order that you may win the pearl by waiting patiently."

Shiblī asked what he must do.

"Go," said Junayd, "and sell sulphur."

At the end of a year he said to Shiblī :

"This trading makes you well known. Become a dervish and occupy yourself solely with begging."

During a whole year Shiblī wandered through the streets of Baghdād, begging of the passers-by, but no one heeded him. Then he returned to Junayd, who exclaimed :

"See now ! You are nothing to the people's eyes. Never set your mind to them or take any account of them at all. For some time" (he continued) "you were a chamberlain and acted

governor of a province. Go to that country and ask pardon of all those whom you have wronged."

Shiblī obeyed and spent four years in going from door to door, until he had obtained an acquittance from every person except one, whom he failed to trace. On his return, Junayd said to him :

"You still have some regard to reputation. Go and be a beggar for one year more."

Every day Shiblī used to bring the alms that were given him to Junayd, who bestowed them on the poor and kept Shiblī without food until the next morning. When a year had passed in this way, Junayd accepted him as one of his disciples on condition that he should perform the duties of a servant to the others. After a year's service, Junayd asked him :

"What think you of yourself now ?"

Shiblī replied : "I deem myself the meanest of God's creatures." "Now," said the master, "your faith is firm."

I need not dwell on the details of this training—the fasts and vigils, the vows of silence, the long days and nights of solitary meditation, all the weapons and tactics, in short, of that battle against one's self which the Prophet declared to be more painful and meritorious than the Holy War. On the other hand, my readers will expect me to

describe in a general way the characteristic theories and practices for which the 'Path' is a convenient designation. These may be treated under the following heads : Poverty, Mortification, Trust in God, and Recollection. Whereas poverty is negative in nature, involving detachment from all that is worldly and unreal, the three remaining terms denote the positive counterpart of that process, namely, the ethical discipline by which the soul is brought into harmonious relations with Reality.

The fatalistic spirit which brooded darkly over the childhood of Islam—the feeling that all human actions are determined by an unseen Power, and in themselves are worthless and vain—caused renunciation to become the watchword of early Moslem asceticism. Every true believer is bound to abstain from unlawful pleasures, but the ascetic acquires merit by abstaining from those which are lawful. At first, renunciation was understood almost exclusively in a

Poverty. material sense. To have as few worldly goods as possible seemed the surest means of gaining salvation. Dāwud al-Tā'ī owned nothing except a mat of rushes, a brick which he used as a pillow, and a leathern vessel which served him for drinking and washing. A certain man dreamed that he saw Mālik ibn Dīnār and Mohammed ibn Wāsi' being led into Para-

lise, and that Mālik was admitted before his companion. He cried out in astonishment, for he thought Mohammed ibn Wāsi' had a superior claim to the honour. "Yes," came the answer, "but Mohammed ibn Wāsi' possessed two shirts, and Mālik only one. That is the reason why Mālik is preferred."

The Sūfī ideal of poverty goes far beyond this. True poverty is not merely lack of wealth, but lack of desire for wealth: the empty heart as well as the empty hand. The 'poor man' (*faqīr*) and the 'mendicant' (*derwīsh*) are names by which the Mohammedan mystic is proud to be known, because they imply that he is stripped of every thought or wish that would divert his mind from God. "To be severed entirely from both the present life and the future life, and to want nothing besides the Lord of the present life and the future life—that is to be truly poor." Such a *faqīr* is denuded of individual existence, so that he does not attribute to himself any action, feeling, or quality. He may even be rich, in the common meaning of the word, though spiritually he is the poorest of the poor; for, sometimes, God endows His saints with an outward show of wealth and worldliness in order to hide them from the profane.

No one familiar with the mystical writers will need to be informed that their terminology is ambiguous, and that the same word



frequently covers a group, if not a multitude, of significations diverging more or less widely according to the aspect from which it is viewed. Hence the confusion that is apparent in Sūfī text-books. When 'poverty,' for example, is explained by one interpreter as a transcendental theory and by another as a practical rule of religious life, the meanings cannot coincide. Regarded from the latter standpoint, poverty is only the beginning of Sūlism. *Faqīr* Jāmī says, renounce all worldly things for the sake of pleasing God. They are urged to this sacrifice by one of three motives (a) Hope of an easy reckoning on the Day of Judgment, or fear of being punished (b) desire of Paradise; (c) longing for spiritual peace and inward composure. Thus, inasmuch as they are not disinterested but seek to benefit themselves, they fall below the Sūfī, who has no will of his own and depends absolutely on the will of God. It is the absence of 'self' that distinguishes the Sūfī from the *faqīr*.

Here are some maxims for dervishes :

"Do not beg unless you are starving. The Caliph Omar flogged a man who begged after having satisfied his hunger. When compelled to beg, do not accept more than you need."

"Be good-natured and uncomplaining and thank God for your poverty."

“Do not flatter the rich for giving, nor blame them for withholding.”

“Dread the loss of poverty more than the rich man dreads the loss of wealth.”

“Take what is voluntarily offered : it is the daily bread which God sends to you ; do not refuse God’s gift.”

“Let no thought of the morrow enter your mind, else you will incur everlasting perdition.”

“Do not make God a springe to catch alms.”

The Sūfī teachers gradually built up a system of asceticism and moral culture which is founded on the fact that there is in man an element of evil—the lower or appetitive soul. This evil self, the seat of passion and lust, is called *nafs* ; The *nafs*. it may be considered broadly equivalent to ‘the flesh,’ and with its allies, the world and the devil, it constitutes the great obstacle to the attainment of union with God. The Prophet said : “Thy worst enemy is thy *nafs*, which is between thy two sides.” I do not intend to discuss the various opinions as to its nature, but the proof of its materiality is too curious to be omitted. Mohammed ibn ‘Ulyān, an eminent Sūfī, relates that one day something like a young fox came forth from his throat, and God caused him to know that

it was his *nafs*. He trod on it, but it grew bigger at every kick that he gave it. He

“Other things are destroyed by fire and blows: why dost thou increase

“Because I was created perversely,” he replied; “what is pain to others is pleasure to me, and their pleasure is my pain.”

The *nafs* of Hallāj was seen in the shape of a dog; other cases are recorded in which it appeared as a snake or a mouse.

Mortification of the *nafs* is the chief duty of devotion, and leads, directly or indirectly, to the contemplative life. All the Sūfīs are agreed that no disciple who neglects this duty will ever learn the rudiments of Sūfism. The principle of mortification

Mortification, that the *nafs* should be weaned from those things to which it is accustomed, that it should be encouraged to resist its passions, that its pride should be broken, and that it should be brought through suffering and tribulation to recognise the vileness of its original nature and the impurity of its actions. Concerning the outward methods of mortification, such as fasting, silence, and solitude, a great deal might be written, but we must now pass to the higher ethical discipline which completes the Path.

Self-mortification, as advanced Sūfīs

understand it, is a moral transmutation of the inner man. When they say, "Die before ye die," they do not mean to assert that the lower self can be essentially destroyed, but that it can and should be purged of its attributes, which are wholly evil. These attributes—ignorance, pride, envy, uncharitableness, etc.—are extinguished, and replaced by the opposite qualities, when the will is surrendered to God and when the mind is concentrated on Him. Therefore 'dying to self' is really 'living in God.' The mystical aspects of the doctrine thus stated will occupy a considerable part of the following chapters; here we are mainly interested in its ethical import.

The Sūfī who has eradicated self-will is said, in technical language, to have reached the 'stages' of 'acquiescence' or 'satisfaction' (*ridā*) and 'trust in God' (*tawakkul*).

A dervish fell into the Tigris. Seeing that he could not swim, a man on the bank cried out, "Shall I tell some one to bring you ashore?" "No," said the dervish. "Then do you wish to be drowned?" "No." "What, then, do you wish?" The dervish replied, "God's will be done! What have I to do with wishing?"

'Trust in God,' in its extreme form, involves the renunciation of every personal initiative and volition; total passivity like

that of a corpse in the hands of the one who prepares it for burial ; perfect indifference towards anything but the Trust in God. even remotely connected with one's self. A special class of the Sūfis took their name from this attitude which they applied, so far as they were able, to matters of everyday life. In this stance, they would not seek food, wear, or hire, practise any trade, or allow money to be given them when they wanted. Quietly they committed themselves to God's care, never doubting that He, to whom belong the treasures of earth and heaven, would provide for their wants, and that their allotted portion would come to them as surely as it comes to the birds, the farmer neither sow nor reap, and to the fish in the sea, and to the child in the womb.

These principles depend ultimately on the Sūfistic theory of the divine unity, as is shown by Shaqīq of Balkh in the following passage :

“ There are three things which a Sūfi is bound to practise. Whosoever neglects any one of them must neglect them all, and whosoever adheres to any one of them must need to them all. Strive, therefore, to stand, and consider heedfully.”

“ The *first* is this, that you purify your mind and your tongue and your heart, and you declare God to be One ; a

having declared Him to be One, and having declared that none benefits you or harms you except Him, you devote all your actions to Him alone. If you act a single jot of your actions for the sake of another, your thought and speech are corrupt, since your motive in acting for another's sake must be hope or fear; and when you act from hope or fear of other than God, who is the lord and sustainer of all things, you have taken to yourself another god to honour and venerate.

“*Secondly*, that while you speak and act in the sincere belief that there is no God except Him, you should trust Him more than the world or money or uncle or father or mother or any one on the face of the earth.

“*Thirdly*, when you have established these two things, namely, sincere belief in the unity of God and trust in Him, it behoves you to be satisfied with Him and not to be angry on account of anything that vexes you. Beware of anger! Let your heart be with Him always, let it not be withdrawn from Him for a single moment.”

The ‘trusting’ Sūfī has no thought beyond the present hour. On one occasion Shaqīq asked those who sat listening to his discourse :

“If God causes you to die to-day, think ye that He will demand from you the prayers of to-morrow?” They answered: “No; how should He demand from us the prayers of a day on which we are not alive?” Shaqīq said: “Even as He will not demand from you the prayers of to-morrow, so do ye not seek from Him the prevender of to-morrow. It may be that ye will not live so long.”

In view of the practical consequences of attempting to live ‘on trust,’ it is not surprising to read the advice given to those who would perfectly fulfil the doctrine. “Let them dig a grave and bury themselves.” Later Sūfīs hold that active exertion for the purpose of obtaining the means of subsistence is quite compatible with ‘trust,’ according to the saying of the Prophet, “Trust in God and tie the camel’s leg.” They define *tawakkul* as an habitual state of mind, which is impaired only by self-pleasing thoughts; e.g. it was accounted a breach of ‘trust’ to think Paradise a more desirable place than Hell.

What type of character is such a theory likely to produce? At the worst, a useless drone and hypocrite preying upon his fellow-creatures; at the best, a harmless dervish who remains unmoved in the midst of sorrow, meets praise and blame with equal

indifference, and accepts insults, blows, torture and death as mere incidents in the eternal drama of destiny. This cold morality, however, is not the highest of which Sūfism is capable. The highest morality springs from nothing but love, when self-surrender becomes self-devotion. Of that I shall have something to say in due time.

Among the positive elements in the Sūfī discipline there is one that Moslem mystics unanimously regard as the keystone of practical religion. I refer to the *dhikr*, an exercise well known to Western readers from the careful description given by Edward Lane in his *Modern Egyptians*, and by Professor D. B. Macdonald in his recently published *Aspects of Islam*. The term

Recollection. • *dhikr*—‘recollection’ seems to

me the most appropriate equivalent in English—signifies ‘mentioning,’ ‘remembering,’ or simply ‘thinking of’; in the Koran the Faithful are commanded to “remember God often,” a plain act of worship without any mystical savour. But the Sūfīs made a practice of repeating the name of God or some religious formula, e.g., “Glory to Allah” (*subhān Allah*), “There is no god but Allah” (*lā ilāha illa ’llah*), accompanying the mechanical intonation with an intense concentration of every faculty upon the single word or phrase; and they attach greater value to this irregular



litany, which enables them to enjoy uninterrupted communion with God, than to the five services of prayer performed, at fixed hours of the day and night, by all Moslems. Recollection may be either spoken or silent, but it is best, according to the usual opinion, that tongue and mind should co-operate. Sahl ibn 'Abdallah bade one of his disciples endeavour to say "Allah! Allah!" the whole day without intermission. When he had acquired the habit of doing so, Sahl instructed him to repeat the same words during the night, until they came forth from his lips even while he was asleep. "Now," said he, "be silent and occupy yourself with recollecting them." At last the disciple's whole being was absorbed by the thought of Allah. One day a dog fell on his head, and the words "Allah, Allah" were seen written in the blood that trickled from the wound.

Ghazālī describes the method and effects of *dhikr* in a passage which Macdonald has summarised as follows :

"Let him reduce his heart to a state in which the existence of anything and its non-existence are the same to him. Then let him sit alone in some corner, limiting his religious duties to what is absolutely necessary, and not occupying himself either with reciting the *Koran* or considering its meaning, or with

books of religious traditions or with anything of the sort.' And let him see to it that nothing save God most High enters his mind. Then, as he sits in solitude, let him not cease saying continuously with his tongue, '*Allah, Allah,*' keeping his thought on it. At last he will reach a state when the motion of his tongue will cease, and it will seem as though the word flowed from it. Let him persevere in this until all trace of motion is removed from his tongue, and he finds his heart persevering in the thought. Let him still persevere until the form of the word, its letters and shape, is removed from his heart, and there remains the idea alone, as though clinging to his heart, inseparable from it. So far, all is dependent on his will and choice; but to bring the mercy of God does not stand in his will or choice. He has now laid himself bare to the breathings of that mercy, and nothing remains but to await what God will open to him, as God has done after this manner to prophets and saints. If he follows the above course, he may be sure that the light of the Real will shine out in his heart. At first unstable, like a flash of lightning, it turns and returns; though sometimes it hangs back. And if it returns, sometimes it

abides and sometimes it is momentary, and sometimes it is momentary, and sometimes it is momentary. And if it abides, sometimes its duration is long, and sometimes short." They

Another Sūfī puts the gist of the idea in a sentence, thus :

"The first stage of *dhikr* is to forget self, and the last stage is the forgetment of the worshipper in the act of worship, without consciousness of self or of worship, and such absorption in the object of worship as precludes return to subject thereof."

Recollection can be aided in various ways. When Shiblī was a novice, he went into a cellar, taking with him a bundle of sticks. If his attention flagged, he would beat himself until the sticks broke, sometimes the whole bundle would be finished before evening; then he would dash his hands and feet against the wall. The Indian practice of inhaling and exhaling the breath was known to the Sūfīs of the ninth century and was much used afterwards. Among the Dervish Orders music, singing and dancing are favourite means of inducing the state of trance called 'passing-away' (*fanā*), which, as appears from the definition quoted above, is the climax and *raison d'être* of the method.

In 'meditation' (*murāqabat*) we recognise a form of self-concentration similar to the Buddhistic *āhyāna* and *saṃādhi*. This is

what the Prophet meant when he said, 'Worship God as though thou sawest Him, or if thou seest Him not, yet He sees thee.' Any one who feels sure that God is always watching over him will devote himself to

**Meditation.** meditating on God, and no evil thoughts or diabolic suggestions will find their way into his heart. Nūrī used to meditate so intently that not a hair on his body stirred. He declared that he had learned this habit from a cat which was observing a mouse-hole, and that she was far more quiet than he. Abū Saīd bn. Abi 'l-Khayr kept his eyes fixed on hisavel. It is said that the Devil is smitten with epilepsy when he approaches a man who is occupied, just as happens to other men when the Devil takes possession of them.

This chapter will have served its purpose. It has brought before my readers a clear view of the main lines on which the preparatory training of the Sūfī is conducted. We must now imagine him to have been invested by his Sheykh with the patched rock (*muraqqat* or *khirqat*), which is an outward sign that he has successfully emerged from the discipline of the 'Path,' and is now advancing with uncertain steps towards the Light, as when toil-worn travellers, having gained the summit of a deep gorge, suddenly catch glimpses of the sun and cover their eyes.

## CHAPTER II

### ILLUMINATION AND ECSTASY

GOD, who is described in the Koran as "Light of the heavens and the earth," can not be seen by the bodily eye. He is visible only to the inward sight of the 'heart'. In the next chapter we shall return to this spiritual organ, but I am not going to enter into the intricacies of Sūfī psychology any further than is necessary. The 'vision of the heart' (*ru'yat al-qalb*) is defined as the heart's beholding by the light of that which is hidden in the heart. This is what 'Alī meant when he asked, "Do you see God?" "How should we worship One whom we do not see?" The light of intuition (*yaqīn*) by which the heart is illumined is a beam of God's own light which is reflected by Himself; else no vision of Him would be possible.

"'Tis the sun's self that lets the sun be seen."

According to a mystical interpretation of the famous passage in the Koran where the light of Allah is compared to a candle

ing in a lantern of transparent glass, which is placed in a niche in the wall, the eye is the true believer's heart; therefore his speech is light and his works are light and he moves in light. "He who discourses of eternity," said Bāyazīd, "must have in him the lamp of eternity."

Light which gleams in the heart of an illuminated mystic endows him with a supernatural power of discernment (*firāsāt*). Although the Sūfīs, like all other Moslems, acknowledge Mohammed to be the last of the prophets (as, from a different point of view, he is the Logos or first of created things), they really claim to possess a minor form of inspiration. When Nūrī was questioned concerning the origin of mystical *firāsāt*, he answered by quoting the Koranic verse in which God says that He breathed His spirit into Adam; but the more orthodox Sūfīs, who strenuously combat the doctrine that the human spirit is uncreated and eternal, affirm that *firāsāt* is the result of knowledge and insight, metaphorically called 'light' or 'inspiration,' which God creates and bestows upon His favourites. Tradition, "Beware of the discernment of the true believer, for he sees by the light of Allah," is exemplified in such anecdotes as these:

Abū Abdallah al-Rāzī said :

"Ibn al-Anbārī presented me with a













